

# HARTFORD FOOD SYSTEM

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Good evening Senator Slossberg, Representative Fleischman and members of the Appropriations Education subcommittee. My name is Gabriel Walker and I am a student at University High School of Science and Engineering in Hartford. I am also a member of Grow Hartford, which is an after school youth program that tackles food access and food justice issues in the Hartford community. As part of Grow Hartford I learn about the inequalities in our food system and what can be done to stand up for our rights and fight those inequalities. This is why I am here to speak against cuts to the Healthy Food Certification Program.

As I understand it, the Healthy Food Certification Program has helped students access healthier foods during our lunches. With our school lunches already giving us the bare minimum to eat to last for the day, a cut of \$.10 per meal would make it even harder for us to get by. If the government cuts the Healthy Food Certification Program, Hartford will have \$325,000 less per year to fund our school lunches. It is not ok for you to make decisions on these matters without having heard input from us (the youth) who are really affected by this issue.

If this cut goes through, the fruit or the box of salad that we get along with our hot meal will probably be the first thing to go. My friends and I really like the fruit and salad that is offered in addition to our hot meal. These types of food items should not be taken away from us, especially without having consulted us on our opinions beforehand. Having less variety as part of our school lunch makes us less likely to eat the entire meals that we are offered.

School lunch is a necessity and we should have all the money we need for us to feel safe and full. How are we supposed to learn and concentrate if we don't get enough nutrition throughout the day? For some of my peers school lunch is the only time they get to eat during the day, so when the lunch doesn't have any variety and they really don't like to eat that one item, then kids often opt to not eat anything at all. Nearly 3 million children experience hunger on a daily basis, many of them rely on churches, food banks and school lunch programs to get by. Did you know that if kids are hungry it leads to higher levels of aggression or hyperactivity that can lead to disruptions in the classroom? We see this happening on a daily basis. I have friends who are athletes and are expected to get by on three pieces of chicken tenders and milk and a choice of fruit. With this as our energy source, how are we expected to contribute to society, make good grades, contribute to the overall school performance and later on go to college? More funding will allow schools to do more with the menu.

Hartford youth are already dealing with a lot of health issues, the populations that live in Hartford are already more prone to get diabetes and high cholesterol. Given the already apparent lack of resources to lead a healthy life in Hartford, a reduction of the healthy food options in my school lunches would make you responsible for shortening the life span of me and my peers.